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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001161

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/01/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KDEM GG

SUBJECT: POLICE CHIEF KILLED, SANAKOYEV TARGETED IN SOUTH OSSETIA

REF: TBILISI 1141

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Explosions in South Ossetia

¶1. (SBU) OSCE told Poloff July 3 that separatist South Ossetian police chief Nodar Bibilov was killed in an explosion outside his home around 0600 in the South Ossetian village of Dmenisi on July 3. The OSCE told Post that a monitoring team had visited the site. They said an explosive device was set in an outside toilet that was somehow activated, perhaps by a cow. The explosion fatally injured Bibilov, who was apparently nearby in the yard. He died after being taken to a hospital. The de facto authorities immediately labeled the attack a "terrorist act" carried out by Georgian secret services. (Note: Bibilov led an attack on a Georgian police station 2-3 years ago, when Irakli Okruashvili was Defense Minister. In the attack, Bibilov and his men kidnapped Georgian police in a very public and humiliating manner. The de facto authorities have alleged this was the reason for the alleged Georgian reprisal. End note.)

¶2. (SBU) In a separate incident, at between 0930 and 1100 on July 3, President of the Georgian Government-backed Temporary Administrative Unit Dmitry Sanakoyev's motorcade was attacked. OSCE told Post that a mine was detonated near his motorcade on a road in Tskhinvali, as Sanakoyev was on his way to the European Neighborhood Policy Conference in Batumi. After the explosion, a shootout ensued between Sanakoyev's Georgian bodyguards and the attackers. Three Georgian policemen (Sanakoyev's bodyguards) were taken to the Gori military hospital and treated for injuries. Sanakoyev was not hurt and there were no other reported casualties.

Who's Behind the Attacks

¶3. (C) OSCE Political Advisor Gancho Gantchev told Poloff that he does not believe the Georgians killed Bibilov. Gantchev said Bibilov was a powerful, local figure who was likely involved in smuggling and other nefarious activity and was resented for his influence. Gantchev believes it likely that Bibilov was targeted for one of these reasons. Conversely, Gantchev told Poloff that he believes Sanakoyev was targeted specifically by the South Ossetian de facto authorities. Gantchev said the OSCE does not/not possess any info indicating that the two incidents in South Ossetia were related to each other or to recent explosions in Abkhazia (reftel). Separately, MOIA's Shota Utiashvili told Post that the Georgian Government believed that South Ossetian de facto leader Kokoity was behind the attack on Sanakoyev, as a result of previous death threats against Sanakoyev as well as the purported fact that bombs had been planted previously against other Georgians by South Ossetians in this same area.

Russian Missions in Abkhazia?

¶4. (SBU) On July 3 Georgian officials reacted strongly and negatively to alleged Russian reports -- reported by Georgian Rustavi-2 TV -- that the Russian Foreign Ministry announced it will establish diplomatic missions in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. These missions would allegedly carry out all the official functions of an embassy. Reportedly, the Sukhumi mission was to open on July 2, but was postponed due to the recent blasts. The Tskhinvali mission would reportedly open on July 9. MP Givi Targamadze, Chair of the Defense and Security Committee, and Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili both denounced the move as further evidence Russia is attacking Georgia's sovereignty. UNOMIG told Poloff on July 3 that the rumor originated with the de facto Abkhaz press secretary on July 2. De facto president Sergey Shamba later reportedly said publicly the plan was "unfortunately" not true. He went on to say the Abkhaz would welcome a diplomatic mission in Sukhumi and negotiations for one continue. However, Shamba said there were no imminent plans for such a mission.

Comment

¶5. (C) These latest attacks mark the fourth set of explosions in Georgia's separatist regions in five days, at a time when five nations' presidents were in Batumi for the GUAM conference. To date, the Georgian population seems somewhat inured to the situation. As explosions are not all that uncommon in the separatist regions, only the increased

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frequency of them is notable.
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